



Women's League for Conservative Judaism

**Mishpachah: The Modern Jewish Family**

**MODERN RITUALS**  
**A Search for New Meanings**

**Conversation Piece 2**

**THE FAMILY BAPTISMAL GOWN**

When my husband was born, his very unassimilated (but nevertheless well educated) grandmother went to a store on the Lower East Side to purchase an outfit for his *pidyon-ha-ben* (a ceremony for a first born son of a non-kohen).

She ventured into a store, presumably for children, and purchased, I only can surmise *unknowingly*, a baptismal gown. It was long and white, made of satin, with a long under-slip as well, and topped off with a white bonnet with long satin ties. There is a ruffle along the bottom, and a full complement of lace on its bodice.

My husband wore this when he was “redeemed” by a kohen (priest) on the 30th day of his life. Each of his other brothers wore the gown at his *bris*. When our three daughters were born, each wore the “*baptismal/pidyon ha-ben, brit milah* gown” at their namings.

In subsequent years, it has also been worn by assorted the babies of other extended family members, as well. Now more yellowed and frayed than white and pristine, the gown is a precious and integral part of our family's rites of Jewish passage.